Book Review

Columeau, Julien. *Linguistic Resistance in Pakistan: Punjabi Language Movements After Independence.* 288pp. Columbia University Press 2026.

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Language politics and the place of Punjabi in the Pakistani literary scene have never been simple matters. In many ways the multiple ways in which movements for and against Punjabi emerge and disappear reflects the contestation over the heart of the nation itself. Julien Columeau is an interesting interlocutor in these debates, given his French upbringing and concomitant status as an Urdu author of some repute. In some sense this is then the view of Punjabi from an Urdu writer who has descended from the literary heights and condescended, perhaps due to his background, to take Punjabi seriously as a literary concern. In the period 1947 to 1960, the book's historical confines, this would be considered a bizarre thing for an Urdu-speaking litterateur to undertake. Independence fervour had been most acutely presented in an almost vociferous assertion of Urdu (let us remember Jinnah's 1948 speech) to consolidate the nascent nation. To recover a history of Punjabi in this period is therefore the strongest contribution of this book. Drawing on literary magazines and key figures from the period, the book offers insights into the way in which the communalised debates of the pre-partition period morphed into a range of political positions. These are categorised by the author as Marxist, Conservative and Modernist.

Columeau demonstrates these various strands through examination of specific material. His discussion of the progressive journal *Imroz* is insightful, as under Mian Iftikharuddin, the newspaper created space for Punjabi poetry, prose, criticism and linguistic debate. Its Punjabi column and later page made vernacular writing available to a readership far larger than that of specialist literary magazines. The author rightly notes the division among the left: the radical programme associated with Firozuddin Mansur and Sibt-e-Hassan, under which Punjabi would become a provincial language of government and education, was exceptional rather than representative. Most Communists continued to describe Punjabi as insufficiently developed and accepted Urdu as the principal language of administration and wider communication. This conservative current chimes well with the journal Monthly Panjabi, whose editors Faqeer Mohammad Faqeer, Abdul Majid Salik and Mohammad Baqir developed an extensive literary and linguistic programme of activity. They mobilised prestigious journalists and academics, established organisations, convened conferences and secured the creation of a Punjabi academy. In some senses similar to the Marxists, the Conservatives (in Columeau's differentiation) repeatedly affirmed Urdu's national supremacy, distanced themselves from Bengali and Sindhi demands, and represented Punjabi primarily as a literary inheritance compatible with the Pakistani state. In examining this journal and this group, Columeau brings a significant gap in the understanding of Lahore's literary scene to the fore.

It is not clear, either in the somewhat crass deployment of Bourdieu or in broader analytical terms, what the division between Marxists and Conservatives achieves, other than to show splinters in the Urdu movements, as it is only in the 1960s that the question of language and subaltern classes takes on any political meaning in Punjab (though as noted this is not the same for Sindhi or Bengali). The author is most consistent and comfortable in writing about the Panjabi Majlis. In the tradition of Halqa-e- Arbab-e-Zaug, the Panjabi Majlis provides the space for the libertarian strand that often sits at the heart of most literary cultures. In exploring free verse, urban alienation, psychological interiority and experimental prose, the choice of language is for aesthetic requirements rather than related to a Marxist or Conservative ideology (in Columeau's framing). These writers work across languages and offer a clear appeal to an Urdu writer writing about them. Rather typically, this group is presented as the most victimised in the author's typology, with attacks from left and right, and suppression by the Ayub Khan regime. The author might have benefited from a reading of those parts of Bourdieu in which class remains an important analytical category in understanding cultural distinction. In recognising the common class

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background of the Lahori literary scene, the distinctions within this social field are relatively minor and fluid. Individuals crossed boundaries, collaborated tactically and changed positions. Abdul Majid Bhatti, Safdar Mir and others cannot be contained easily within a single pole. The Punjabi field was a smaller reflection of Lahore's Urdu intellectual field; writing in Punjabi could not alter an author's class position but it might shift the audience and relationship to literary authority. It is other sites of production of Punjabi in this period (churches, dargahs, oral traditions) that would be of actual contrast in terms of fields of cultural production, but understandably that was not part of this book's remit.

Perhaps of more concern, this is a homosocial thesis, with little attention to the way in which gender structures the social field. The readings of Ahmad Rahi's Tirinjan and other representations of women are welcome, but this visibility is as literary voices, victims and symbols of partition. Their absence in the organisation and management of magazines reflect how Punjabi develops as an urban, male-dominated literary language which stands in contrast to the popular use of the language amongst working class urban communities and rural women. A gendered/class-based analysis would open up other vistas, and even a cursory insight into sexuality would open up interesting questions for the 'modernist' strand of inquiry.

Despite these reservations, Columeau has produced a major work of recovery. The book establishes that the Punjabi movement did not begin in the 1960s and represents the journals, organisations, debates and writers through which, after the destruction of pre-Partition Lahore's literary world, Punjabi survived as a language of modern cultural production. Most importantly, it demonstrates that Punjabi's resilience cannot be explained by the state, which continued to deny it meaningful institutional power. It survived through the labour of writers, editors, publishers and activists working within and against competing political projects. Columeau's archive provides the basis for a broader analytical inquiry in which literature is not treated as an ornament to politics, but as one of the principal terrains on which class, gender, sexuality and language are integral to this sphere of cultural production.

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